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ABSTRACT

Noting that young children in the Republic of Korea have received institutional education and care for more than 100 years, this report provides an in-depth analysis of Korea's reform of its early childhood education and care (ECEC) system. The analysis focuses on how ECEC has evolved, the current system, why Korea has attempted to reform the system, efforts that have been made in the reform process, and the reasons for the lack of success of the reform. The reform began with the key idea that national administrative systems be organized by age group, so that the Ministry of Education would take charge of care and education for 3- to 5-year-olds and the Ministry of Health and Welfare would be responsible for the care of children under 3 years rather than its current situation in which the Ministry of Education serves 3- to 5-year-olds and the Ministry of Health and Welfare provides childcare services from birth to age 5. The report notes that although the reform of the Korean ECEC system has not been successful, there has been some impact, including increasingly integrated kindergarten and childcare services, strengthened cooperation and greater influence among ECEC associations, increased parental participation and concern, and increased research on the ECEC system. The report concludes by pointing out that the main reasons ECEC system reform failed were: (1) the inability to reach consensus among scholars, those involved in kindergarten and childcare facilities, and public organizations regarding the concept of education and care; and (2) the authority-centered attitudes of government officials. (Contains 19 references.) (KB)

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Integrating Policies and Systems for Early Childhood Education and Care: The Case of the Republic of Korea

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Integrating Policies and Systems for Early Childhood Education and Care: The Case of the Republic of Korea

I. Introduction

This report provides an in-depth analysis of the Republic of Korea's reform of its early childhood education and care (henceforth ECEC) system.

Young children in the Republic of Korea have received institutional education and care for more than 100 years. Despite this long history, national policies have developed separately for "education" and "care", with distinct systems for regulation, staffing, funding and delivery. To this day, ECEC in the Republic of Korea are delivered under a system of dual, parallel administration. "Education" is provided through kindergartens under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, while "care" is provided through childcare facilities under the management of the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

Changes in Korean society have made the need to reform this system increasingly apparent. From the early 1990s, rapid industrialisation and the growing prevalence of nuclear families over extended families affected the demand for early childhood education and care. In particular, the need for integrated education and care services for young children has increased. The Korean government, however, did not initially respond actively to this demand, leaving it instead to market forces.

In 1997, the Presidential Commission on Educational Reform proposed "A Reform Plan for the Early Childhood Education System" as part of a broader, nationwide reform. The commission proposed that education and care for children from age three would be provided by preschools under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, while care and education for children under three would be managed by the Ministry of Health and Welfare (Presidential Commission on Education Reform, 1997).

By 2002, no noticeable change had come about in the early childhood education and care system. The relevant academic and non-academic organisations disagree sharply over the pros and cons of the reform plan. The government has avoided facing what it considers to be a "hot issue", while members of the National Assembly are influenced by their own interests. In this sense the Republic of Korea has not been a successful case in reforming ECEC system. However the Ministries of Education and Human Resources Development and of Health and Welfare have been making constant efforts to examine the issues, and it can be said that Korea's ECEC system is still in the process of being reformed.

The present analysis of ECEC system reform process in the Republic of Korea examines the following major issues: how ECEC has evolved in the country; the current system under which ECEC services are provided; why Korea has attempted to reform the system; efforts that have been made in the reform process; and the reasons for the lack of success of the reform despite such efforts.

The analysis begins with a history and description of the systems of ECEC in Korea. The context and background of the preparation of "A Reform Plan for the Early Childhood Education System" and the reform processes are then examined. Finally the outcomes, impacts and implications of the system reform, though unsuccessful, are presented and discussed.

1.1. A History of Early Childhood Education and Care in Korea

Early childhood education and care are considered separately since the "education" and "care" of young children in Korea developed separately from distinct origins.

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Education of Young Children

The education of young children in Korea has developed mainly through the kindergarten, the official educational institution for children aged three to six (before entering elementary school).

The first kindergarten in Korea was established by the Japanese in 1897 during the colonial period. It was in 1913 that Koreans established a kindergarten for their own children for the first time. In 1914, an American missionary established a college-affiliated kindergarten was and, in conjunction with it, a department for training kindergarten teachers was also established.

Regulations for kindergartens were issued for the first time in 1922 and were included later in education laws passed in 1949. In 1969, the Ministry of Education developed a national kindergarten curriculum. Like the national curricula for elementary, middle and high school, it has been revised every five years, and the sixth curriculum is the one currently in use.

The first public kindergarten was established in 1976. The 1981 government "Policy for the Development of Early Childhood Education" brought about a remarkable increase in the number of public as well as private kindergartens. A total of 1,927 public kindergartens were established, mostly in rural areas, and 1,023 private kindergartens, mostly in cities. Accordingly, departments of early care were established in junior colleges to train prospective kindergarten teachers.

With the 1982 *Early Childhood Education Promotion Act*, Saemaul Nursery Schools were founded under the supervision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. These schools integrated the co-op nurseries under the Ministry of Internal Affairs; Childcare centres under the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, and Daycare in the farming season under the Office of Rural Development. In 1983, the Ministry of Education and local education authorities hired early childhood superintendents whose main task was to regulate the quality of education provided to children by both public and private kindergartens. Currently, early childhood superintendents are assigned to local education authorities (i.e., city, county, district).

In 1991, under a presidential decree, Saemaul nursery schools were required to transform themselves into kindergartens or childcare facilities, and the Ministry of Education took over the work of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. As the Ministry of Welfare increased the number of childcare facilities, kindergartens began including "care" in their programmes. In this context, the Ministry of Education urged kindergartens to provide full-day programmes, and about 80% of kindergartens are currently running extended-day or full-day programmes.

Free early childhood education for one year before formal schooling was legislated in 1997 and put into practice in 2002. About six percent of children in low-income families receive free education at age five.

Compared with the remarkable expansion of childcare facilities, kindergarten facilities are at a standstill. Currently, 545,000 children are enrolled in a total of 8,329 kindergartens including public and private ones. Table 1 presents the numbers and the percentage of children enrolled in kindergarten by age cohorts.

Table 1. Children Enrolled in Kindergarten by Age

Age	3	4	5	Total
No. of Age Cohorts	653,052	673,511	698,375	2,023,938
No. of Children Enrolled	69,599	168,989	306,564	545,152
(%)	(10.7)	(25.1)	(43.9)	(26.9)

Source: Early Childhood Education Division, Ministry of Education and HRD (2001)

Care of Young Children

Care of young children in Korea was started in 1921 by Christian organisations. For the next 50 years, the care of young children was considered mainly as aid for very poor families. It was thus referred to as "daycare" and offered a minimum of safety and tending to the basic needs of socially disadvantaged children.

Childcare facilities in Korea were developed under the 1961 *Child Welfare Act*. As the number of women in the work force increased in the 1980s, the rearing of children by working mothers became a serious social issue. The Ministry of Labour initiated employer childcare under the *Equal Employment Act*, and the Ministry of Health and Welfare oversaw childcare projects. As several administrative authorities were implementing childcare policies with little coherence, women's organisations proposed that childcare become more unified, leading to the passage of the *Child Care Act* in 1991. Since then, the Ministry of Health and Welfare has taken charge of childcare in nationwide.

In order to expand childcare facilities, the government invested 1.3 trillion won (approximately one billion US dollars) from 1995 to 1997. As a result, the number of childcare facilities has increased tenfold, reaching about 20,000 facilities. However, the number of young children enrolled in childcare facilities increased 15-fold, to 734,000. Several factors contributed to this rapid expansion, including strong governmental will and financial support; an increase in the number of clients who needed their children to be in care for more than 12 hours a day throughout the year; a wider age range (i.e., from birth to pre-school age); and a reporting system rather than a licensing system for running childcare facilities. Table 2 presents the numbers and the percentage of children enrolled in childcare facilities by age cohorts.

Table 2. Children Enrolled in Childcare Facilities by Age

Age	0-1	2	3-5	Total
No. of age Cohorts	1,220,569 (4.4%)	624, 919 (18.5%)	2,008,696 (28.2%)	3,854,184 (19%)
No. of children enrolled (%)	53,229 (4.4)	115,346 (18.5)	565,617 (28.2)	734,192 (19.0)

Source: Child Care and Education Division, Ministry of Health and Welfare (2001)

Childcare facilities are basically for children of low-income families and of working mothers. In other words, childcare facilities are primarily concerned with the welfare of children and their families rather than their education. Childcare facilities, like welfare facilities, run according to programmes that emphasise "care" in an educational environment with minimum requirements. In order to provide "education" to children, each childcare facility is legally required to employ at least one teacher with a kindergarten teacher certificate in addition to employing caregivers with at least one year of training.

In 1997, kindergarten associations proposed to the National Assembly that one year of "free education" be provided before elementary school. For their part, childcare facility associations insisted on one year of "free childcare". Starting in 2002, both "free education" and "free childcare" have been provided to five-year-old children of low-income families, who make up 14% of the group. Lately, by admitting children from families of middle socio-economic status, childcare facilities are becoming the second most common ECEC institution in Korea.

As mentioned earlier, "education" and "care" for young children in Korea have developed separately. In the beginning, while kindergartens educated children through half-day programmes, childcare facilities provided daycare for infants and children. Since the 1990s, kindergartens have run full-day programmes by including "care", and childcare facilities have tried to provide "education" in addition to care. In short, kindergartens and childcare facilities in Korea are becoming similar to each other, providing children with education and care in an integrated way. Consequently, on two

occasions attempts have been made to reform the system in order to resolve problems resulting from the involvement of different bodies under various administrative auspices in the education and care of young children. Attempts to unify administrative systems were undertaken in the Ministry of Education in the 1980s, and in the Ministry of Health and Welfare in the 1990s.

Currently, about half of the two million children aged three to five are enrolled in kindergartens and childcare facilities supported by the government. The other half are enrolled in a variety of private early childhood educational institutions, such as family daycare centres called "playrooms", music and art institutions, and so on. According to the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development and the Korean Educational Development Institute (2002), about 510,000 children aged three to five are enrolled in private educational institutions called Hakwons ("learning places"). Korean parents, noted for the strength of their ambitions for their children's education, strongly favour Hakwons, seeing them as one-stop facilities where children can learn a variety of subject matter including art, music, Korean and English more cheaply than at kindergartens and childcare centres. Hakwons, thus, have become the third most prevalent institution of education and care for young children in Korea.

1.2. Early Childhood Education and Care Systems

1.2.1. Administrative Auspices

The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (HRD) and the Ministry of Health and Welfare are the two major administrative authorities in charge of education and care for young children before formal schooling in Korea. While the Ministry of Education provides services for ages three to five, the purview of the Ministry of Health and Welfare extends from birth to age five.

The Early Childhood Education Division

Within the Ministry of Education and HRD, the Early Childhood Education Division under the Bureau of Self-Governing Education is the main authority for the education of young children. Until 2001, the Office of Early Childhood Education and the Office of Special Education were not separate. In response to heightened public concern for the establishment of early childhood education in the public school system and for free education for children at five, the Early Childhood Education Division was founded in 2002. Its major projects are as follows:

- Establishing basic policies for the development of early childhood education;
- Pursuing early childhood education as public education;
- Pursuing free kindergarten education; and
- Establishing and supporting early childhood educational institutions.

The Child Care and Education Division

The main authority for childcare within the Ministry of Health and Welfare is the Child Care and Education Division under the Council of Family Welfare. The Child Care and Education Division, formerly the Department of Child Welfare, was established in May 2002. As the counterpart of the Early Childhood Education Division under the Ministry of Education and HRD, the Child Care and Education Division is a manifestation of government concern for childcare and the high priority placed on childcare by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. It carries out childcare projects for infants and children as well as other child-related tasks. The major projects of the Child Care and Education Division are as follows:

- Establishing and coordinating comprehensive plans for childcare;
- Establishing and amending the Child Care Act and related sub-regulations;
- Conducting research on childcare;

- Establishing government subsidy standards and establishing and delivering
- guidelines for childcare at the national level;
- Selecting and supporting target children for financial aid (e.g., children of low
- income families, five-year-olds);
- Establishing facility standards for special childcare centres (e.g., childcare centres for infants, children with special needs, after-school and extended programmes);
- Staffing and qualifications for childcare givers;
- Developing and delivering standardised childcare curricula and programmes;
- Providing support, guidance and supervision of central and local childcare information centres.

In addition to the Ministries of Education and HRD, and of Health and Welfare, the Ministry of Gender Equality and the Ministry of Labour are involved indirectly in early childhood education and care. These two Ministries aim to support working women and their social participation by lessening the burden of child-rearing. The main arms of government involved are the Department of Women Employment under the Ministry of Labour and the Department of Policy Development and Evaluation under the Ministry of Gender Equality. In particular, the Ministry of Gender Equality proposed the *Comprehensive Child Care Plan* in collaboration with the Ministries of Labour and of Health and Welfare in March 2002. The two Ministries do not provide their own ECEC services. Rather, they deal with policy issues related to childcare.

1.2.2. Services

The representative institutions of early childhood education and care in Korea are kindergartens under the administration of the Ministry of Education, and HRD childcare facilities under the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

Table 3. Types of Early Childhood Education and Care Services

Admin. Authority	Ministry of Education		Ministry of Health and Social Welfare				
Name	Kindergarten		Childcare Facilities (Children's Houses, playrooms)				
Types of ECEC services	National/ Public	Private	National/ public	Private	Work-places	Home	Co-op
Age of target children	3 to 5		0 to 5				

Kindergartens are established and run under the Law of Education and are divided into national/public and private. While public kindergartens are run for half-days on a semester basis, many private kindergartens are run all day all year round.

Childcare facilities are for children of low-income families and working mothers and serve children from 0 to 5 as well as elementary school children after school. Varying in size and funding source, there are national/public facilities, private childcare facilities, children's spaces in workplaces, home daycare (playrooms), and co-op childcare facilities. Basically, childcare facilities run for more than 12 hours a day all year round. Kindergartens and childcare facilities are compared in Table 4.

Table 4. Comparisons of Kindergartens and Childcare Facilities

Aspect	Kindergartens	Childcare Facilities
Legislation	Law for Elementary and Secondary Education Early Childhood Education Promotion Act	Child Care Act
Administrative auspices	Ministry of Education→ Local Education Authority → Elementary Educational Division	Ministry of Health and Welfare →Local Family Welfare Authority → Family Welfare Division
Objectives	Educating young children and facilitating their mental and physical growth by providing appropriate environments	Caring and educating infants and young children whose parents are employed or ill, and promoting family welfare by supporting parental economic and social activities
Staff	Director, Associate Director, Teacher •2-4-year college graduates	Director, Childcare Teacher, Teacher with a Kindergarten teacher certificate •1-year trainee of childcare, 2-4 year college graduate with childcare-related major
Age cohort	3 to the start of formal schooling	0 to the start of formal schooling (care only: 0 to 12)
Enrolment	Universal (If there are too many children for the available places, lots may be drawn to decide placement.)	Selective (universal in reality) •Prioritised for enrolment 1. children in extreme poverty 2. children of low-income families 3. children of working mothers, single parents, broken families 4. others
Enrolment schedule	Beginning of March	Any time on demand
No. of children per class and teacher	Half/extended-day: 30 Full-day: 20	Age 0 –1: 1:5 Age 2: 1: 7 Age 3-5: 1:20
Term period	At least 180 days	All year around except for national holidays (Occasionally, open on holidays by consent between director and parents)
Opening hours	Half-day: 3-5 hours Extended-day: 5-8 hours Full-day: more than 8 hours	More than 12 hours (negotiable according to parents' working hours)
Programme	Based on the national kindergarten curriculum 1. Aimed at development of the whole person including the physical, linguistic, cognitive, emotional, social areas. 2. Play-based, integrated curriculum with five areas: health, social, expression, language, inquiry	Based on childcare programmes 1.Fostering children's physical, cognitive, emotional, social development 2. Nutrition, health, safety and services for parents, exchanges with communities
Fees	National/public: governmental support ($10-45 paid by parents) Private: $85-130 paid by parents • 5-year-old children of low-income families: governmental support (voucher)	National/public: governmental support and parental payment Private: $85-150 paid by parents • 5-year-old children of low-income families: governmental support (voucher)

As of 2001, about 545,000 children from three to five were enrolled in kindergartens and 734,000 infants and children from birth to 12 were enrolled in childcare facilities.

Among children enrolled in kindergartens, 22.5% go to public kindergartens and the rest (77.5%) go to private ones. While about 80% of children attending private kindergartens live in cities, most of those in public kindergartens live in rural and fishing communities. These figures reveal the impact of the 1980s government policy to expand public kindergartens in rural and fishing communities.

Table 5. Kindergarten Enrolment Rates by Region and Funding (2001)

Classification	Total	Big cities	Small cities	Rural /fishing communities
Total (%)	545,152 (100.0)	236,069 (43.3)	204,887 (37.6)	104,196 (19.1)
National/ Public (%)	122,425 (22.5)	21,694 (4.0)	41,931 (7.7.)	58,800 (10.8)
Private (%)	422,727 (77.5)	214,375 (39.3)	162,956 (29.9)	45,396 (8.3)

Source: Department of Early Childhood Education, Ministry of Education, 2001

Among children enrolled in childcare facilities, children over three account for about 77% and children under three are a very small proportion. About 80% of children are enrolled in childcare facilities in cities and only 14% go to national and public facilities (Table 6).

Table 6. Childcare Facility Enrolment Rates by Region and Age (2001) (No: %)

Classification	Total	Big cities	Small cities	Rural/fishing communities
Total (age 0-12)	734,192 (100.0)	311,636 (42.4)	275,402 (37.5)	147,147 (20.0)
3-12 yr-olds	565,617 (77.0)	229,004 (31.2)	215,027 (29.3)	121,607 (16.6)

Source: Central Child Care Information Centre (2001)

Table 7. Numbers of Childcare Facilities and Children Enrolled

Classification	Enrolment (%)
Total	734,192 (100.0)
National/ public	102,118 (13.9)
Private (individual, organisation, legal corporation)	546,946 (74.5)
Work place	7,881 (1.1)
Home (playrooms)	77,247 (10.5)

Source: Central Child Care Information Centre (2001)

In short, the percentage of national and public kindergartens and childcare facilities offering early childhood education and care institutions is very low. In contrast, the percentage of private kindergartens and childcare facilities funded directly by parental fees is very high. The majority of kindergartens and childcare facilities serve children over three, and services for children under three are highly insufficient.

1.2.3. Participation

With the expansion in the 1980s of public kindergartens in Korea's rural and fishing communities, it became common for three-to-five-year-olds to go to kindergartens. The past two decades have seen a ninefold increase in kindergartens and an eightfold increase in enrolment. Currently, about 545,000 children are enrolled in 8,329 kindergartens. Since 1990s, the numbers of kindergartens and children enrolled have decreased due to the expansion of childcare facilities (Table 8).

Table 8. Annual Trends in Kindergarten Enrolment

Year	1980	1985	1990	1995	2001
No. of kindergartens	901	9,257	10,400	8,976	8,329
Enrolment	64,433	549,790	589,223	529,052	545,152
Enrolment rates of children 3 to 5	7.3	33.0 (21.1)*	42.4 (31.0)*	27.1	26.9

Source: Department of Early Childhood Education, Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2001

** 33% and 42.4% are the total enrolment rates in Saemaul nursery schools and kindergartens while 21.1% and 31.0% are the enrolment rates in kindergartens only.*

Childcare facilities increased dramatically after the enactment of the 1991 Child Care Act. During the last decade, childcare facilities increased tenfold and enrolment by a factor of 15. Currently, about 734,000 children are enrolled in 20,000 childcare facilities. The rapid expansion is the result of a government outlay of 1.3 trillion won (about one billion US dollars) from 1995 to 1997.

Table 9. Annual Trends in Childcare Facility Enrolment

Year	1990	1995	2001
No. of facilities	1,919	9,085	20,097
Enrolment	48,000	293,747	734,192

** The age range of children enrolled in childcare facilities is from 0 to 12.*
Source: Central Child Care Information Centre (2001)

It should be noted that approximately 510,000 children were enrolled in Hakwons as of 2002 (Ministry of Education and HRD and Korea Educational Development Institute, 2002). Children are also enrolled in missionary schools and sports centres, but they are not covered by the statistics. Participation rates in early childhood education and care can vary considerably according to whether Hakwons are included. That is, children from three to five enrolled in kindergartens and childcare facilities make up half the total. If other institutions such as Hakwons and missionary-run facilities are included, participation is over 90%, by a rough estimation.

In 2001, the National Assembly acknowledged the educational function of Hakwons and extended tax benefits to parents of three-to-five-year-olds attending them. The yearly benefit of up to $800 was formerly given only to parents of children enrolled in kindergartens and childcare facilities. Interestingly, as of 2002, the benefit was not available for low-income parents of elementary, middle and high school students enrolled in Hakwons (any child over age five), reflecting an inconsistency in the government's policies towards Hakwons.

Korea has among the lowest participation rates in ECEC in the OECD group of countries, according to OECD figure. Specifically, the overall OECD average participation rate in 1996 for children aged three, four and five was 40%, 68% and 82% respectively, compared with 10%, 28% and 42% in Korea.

The OECD indicators, however, cover kindergartens only. Based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), they consider education and care for young children, centre-based education, age range, staff qualifications and training indicated in the ISCED. As a result, they do not consider participation in Children's Houses or Hakwons and thus skew the calculation of participation in ECEC in Korea. In sum, the OECD indicators do not capture the whole picture of participation in ECEC in Korea.

1.2.4. Staffing

The kindergarten teacher certificate is given to graduates specialised in early childhood education in two-or four-year colleges. As of 2001, the total number of kindergarten teachers was 28,975, of whom 67.6% were graduates of two-year colleges and 31.7% of four-year colleges (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development and Korean Educational Development Institute, 2001). In the spring of 2002, early childhood teacher training programmes were extended from two to three years in junior colleges. Thus the percentage of kindergarten teachers who graduated from two-year colleges will decrease over time.

Currently, 16,227 kindergarten teachers (56% of the total) have under five years of teaching experience. Public kindergarten teachers' salaries are commensurate with those of elementary and secondary school teachers; a public kindergarten teacher with five years of experience earned about $20,000 per year as of 2002.

The salaries of private kindergarten teachers are typically decided by the facility's owner or director, and are only 50-60% of those paid to public kindergarten teachers. In theory, private kindergarten teachers should be paid according to public salary scales. However, as private kindergarten teachers gain more experience they face dismissal by directors seeking to cut costs. Thus, turnover rates are high in private kindergartens, where teachers with relatively little experience are preferred (Na, Chang & Park, 1998).

Kindergarten staff consists of a director, an associate director and teachers. But since public kindergartens in Korea are usually affiliated with elementary schools, the principal of the elementary school serves as the director of the kindergarten. As a result, only 63 of a total of 4,209 kindergartens have their own directors.

Table 10. Kindergarten Teachers by Education Levels

Classification	High school graduates	2-yr college graduates	4-yr college graduates & beyond	Total
No.	217	19,585	9,173	28,975
%	0.7	67.6	31.7	100.0

Source: The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development & Korean Educational Development Institute (2001). Annual Statistics on Education.

Staff with a variety of teaching certificates work in childcare facilities. About 57.5% of them are childcare teachers, of whom 48.7% have a kindergarten teacher certificate. Childcare teachers are trainees of one-year programmes or graduates specialised in childcare-related subjects in two- or four-year colleges. By education levels, 40%, 49% and 11% of childcare teachers are graduates of high schools, two-year, and four-year colleges respectively (Seo, Lee, & Lim, 2000). Overall, the education level of childcare teachers is lower than of kindergarten teachers.

Childcare teachers in national and public facilities enjoy greater job security and higher salaries than those in private employment. On the other hand, childcare teachers' salaries are only about 50-60% of kindergarten teachers' in general.

Overall, teachers in national/public kindergartens have the highest education level, salary and job security, followed by teachers in national/public childcare facilities

and those in private kindergartens and in private childcare facilities. This is because public funds provide only for national/public institutions.

Table 11. Childcare Teachers by Teaching Certificates

Classification	Grade 1	Grade2	Teachers with kindergarten teacher certificate	Total
No.	22,923	21,621	21,679	44,544
%	29.6	27.9	48.7	57.5

Source: Central Child Care Information Center (2001)

Table 12. Numbers of Other Childcare Staff

Classification	Director	Doctor	Nurse	Nutritionist	Clerk	Cook	Driver
No.	19,474	264	492	324	954	6,640	4,746
%	25.3	0.3	0.6	0.4	1.2	8.6	6.1

Source: Central Child Care Information Center (2001)

1.2.5. Funding

For years, one percent of the total government budget for education has been allocated to kindergarten education. In 2000, the proportion rose to 1.7% (2,523 billion won), but fell to 1.4% (3,140 billion won) in 2002. About 91% of funding for kindergarten education was invested in public kindergartens.

Noting the minuscule government spending on kindergarten education, the Commission of Education Reform urged an increase to 3-5% of the total education budget. However, there has been no significant change in the last five years.

Local spending on childcare is matched at a rate of almost one-to-one by government funds. The Ministry of Health and Welfare allocated about 5.7% (3,046 billion won) of its total budget to childcare in 2000. Up to 60 percent paid the employers' salaries, and the rest was allocated to childcare for children of low-income families. As of 2002, 4,355 billion won was invested in childcare.

Table 13. Budget for Education vs. Care (in bns of won, 2002)

Education			Care		
Government funding	Local funding	Total	Government funding	Local funding	Total
209 (6.7)	2,921 (93.3)	3,130 (100.0)	2,090 (48.0)	2,264 (52.0)	4,355 (100.0)

Source: Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2002). Ministry of Health and Welfare (2002).

The Ministry of Health and Welfare allocates more funds to childcare than the Ministry of Education allocates to kindergarten education. In both education and childcare budgets, employers' salaries were the biggest portion.

The Act for Free Education for 5-Year-Old Children of Low-Income families took effect in 2002. Free education and care is currently provided to 134,718 children through a voucher system. Registration and fees are waived for the target children in public kindergartens and childcare facilities. A voucher of about $80 per month is paid to the families of target children attending private facilities. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Health and Welfare criteria for qualifying as a low-income family are very strict, and an insufficient number of children have been deemed eligible for free education.

The budgets for education and care and the numbers of children receiving free education are shown in Table 13.

Table 14. Free Education vs. Care for 5-year-olds (2002)

Classification	Early Childhood Education	Childcare
Budget	366 bn won	1,033 bn won
No. of recipient children	47,736	86,982
Recipient institution	Kindergartens	Childcare facilities
Target children	5-yr-old children of low-income families	5-yr-old children of low-income families
Amount (voucher)	Public: Registration fee, tuition Private: no more than $80/month	Public: Childcare fee designated by the government ($100) Private: no more than $80/month

Source: Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2002).

II. Early Childhood Education and Care System Reform

This section examines the situation and the processes of reforming the ECEC system. The key idea of the 1997 "Plan for the Early Childhood Education Reform" was to organise administrative systems by age group, so that the Ministry of Education would take charge of education and care of preschool children from age three to five, while the Ministry of Health and Welfare would be responsible for the care of children under three. This re-division of administrative power is still under consideration.

2.1. Background

2.1.1. Policy incoherence and inefficiency caused by parallel administrations of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Welfare

Since the Ministry of Education is responsible for children aged three to five and the Ministry of Health and Welfare is concerned with the entire 0-5 age group, a parallel administration system exists that is wasteful, with overlapping human resources and redundant budgetary expenditure on policies for children in the same age range. Both ministries may make decisions affecting the same facilities, staff and programmes. Moreover, while kindergartens and childcare facilities actively compete for enrolment numbers, policy for the care of infants (0-2-year-olds) exists only in name.

2.1.2. Basic education faces distortion because of disharmony between government-regulated childcare and Hakwons

Only half of Korean children up to age five are enrolled in kindergartens and childcare facilities regulated by the government. The rest are receiving "talent education" at Hakwons in which children are hurried to acquire a variety of learning abilities, such as English speaking and arithmetic. If this situation persists, it will result in serious gaps in the quality of early childhood education. Ultimately, it could have negative impacts on basic education for Korea's next generation.

2.1.3. The lowest enrolment rates of children aged 3-5 among OECD countries

According to OECD education indicators, the enrolment rate of children over three in Korea is a mere 27%, the lowest level among OECD countries. Furthermore,

access to early childhood education and care is not equal across regions and family income levels. In particular, children of low-income families are almost completely shut out in big cities, where public kindergartens and childcare facilities are rare. High-income parents in urban areas tend to send their children to private kindergartens whereas their low income counterparts send their children to childcare facilities.

2.1.4. Parents bear a heavy financial burden for their children's education and care

As in the United States, infant care and education for young children in Korea operates according to the free market economy. Since almost 80% of the expenses of private kindergarten and childcare facilities are borne by parents, the financial burden on Korean parents is excessively high.

2.1.5. Early childhood education and care institutions are insufficient in number and variety to meet the needs of Korean women to take part in the work force as well as in society

Women's participation in Korean society, compared to that of women in developed countries, is very low, though it is increasing every year. In particular, women's participation in the work force, graphed according to age, is M-shaped, with remarkably low rates of working women from age 25 to 34. This reflects the burden on child-rearing women in this age. Clearly, early childhood institutions are needed to ensure women's social participation by providing children with quality education and care at low cost for the time periods desired by parents.

2.2. Reform Processes

2.2.1. Early Childhood Education Reform Act of 1997

In 1997, "A Reform Plan for Early Childhood Education" sparked intense public debate. The Plan, prepared by the Presidential Commission on Educational Reform, focused on ways to include early childhood education in institutionalised public education systems (Presidential Commission on Educational Reform, 1997).

The Commission was an advisory body set up in 1993 by newly elected President Kim Young Sam, who had declared himself the "education president". It presented five educational reform plans to the president. Those he approved were implemented by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with local educational authorities and schools.

The Reform Plan for Early Childhood Education was the fourth such plan, which began with the following preface indicating its significance and the desired direction for early childhood education reform:

> *"We recognize that early environment plays a critical role in building a foundation of holistic development of human beings. Thus early childhood education is very important for both an individual and a nation. Young children's sound growth and development have positive impacts on achievements and adaptation in the elementary and middle school years. In this sense, early childhood education can be claimed to be the field for the best educational investment. Nevertheless, early childhood education has been always a low priority in educational policy. Moreover, early childhood education has been relying entirely on parents cost-wise. As a result, problems have emerged, such as high financial burden of parents for education of their children, limited women's social participation due to a burden of child rearing, and limited opportunities provided to children for early childhood education before entering the elementary school. In addition, systematic management of and support for early childhood education is absent and the parental needs are not met.*

"In developing countries, quality care is provided to children under 3-year-olds and integrated services of education and care, as part of public education system, are provided to children over 3-year-olds. Governmental recognition of responsibility for ECEC and for supporting families to lessen financial burden have become international trends. Thus, establishing public early childhood education is an urgent task for the Korean government to accomplish." (pp.32-35)

In order to establish early childhood education as institutionalised public education, three directions for reform were proposed: 1) establishing the preschool system, 2) providing one year of free education to children before they enter elementary school, and 3) establishing an early childhood education reform system. The following specifics related to the preschool system:

1. Establishing the preschool system for children from 3 to 5.
   - Preschools will follow the National Preschool Curriculum and offer a variety of full-day programmes to meet varying parental needs.
   - Various educational institutions for 3-5 year olds including kindergartens are encouraged to transform themselves into preschools, if they can meet the required standards.
   - For the legal foundation, the current *Early Childhood Education Promotion Act* shall be revised to prepare an *Early Childhood Education Act* as part of the *Law of Education*.
2. Establishing systems to enhance the quality of preschools.
   - In order to upgrade the qualification levels of preschool teachers, special arrangements will be made to admit them to colleges and to provide them with in-service training.
   - There should be a pre- and in-service training system for preschool teachers.
   - In order to ensure the quality of preschools, supervision needs to be reinforced and undertaken in partnership with the government and non-governmental agencies.
3. Expanding support for preschool by government/self-governing local organisations
   - The budget for education and care of young children needs to increase continuously. Three percent and 5% of the total national budget for education needs to be allocated to the area in 2000 and beyond the year 2005, respectively.
   - The government supports private preschools and ensures their transparent financial management.
   - The government encourages the self-governing organizations to support preschools by operating a matching fund system.
   - The government urges its public agencies and companies to increase the level of their current support for pre-school children to that for elementary, secondary and colleague students.

2.2.2. Special Committee on Early Childhood Education Reform

The Plan proposed by the Presidential Commission on Educational Reform faced strong resistance in the Ministry of Health and Welfare. The Presidential Commission entrusted the Reform Plan to an Educational Reform Committee established in the Office of Administration and Coordination under the Prime Minister. In July 1997, the Educational Reform Commission started the Special Committee on Early Childhood Education Reform consisting of national public officials of the Ministries of Education, of Health and Welfare, and of Finance and Economy as well as representatives of early childhood education and of childcare. After six months of discussions, the Special Committee came to an agreement on the reform plans for promoting early childhood education as follows:

1. Launching/adopting the preschool system

- Transforming kindergartens into preschools as part of the institutionalised school system in the future.
- The clients (parents and children) can choose between preschools and childcare facilities. The current dual system of preschools and childcare facilities will continue for a certain period of time until the eventual integration of the two.

2. Expanding opportunities for ECEC in order to ensure an equal starting point for children

- Increasing ECEC institutions.
- Providing a 1-year free education to children before starting formal schooling.

Unfortunately, the agreed reform plans were not carried out due to the change in government following the elections of 1997, as well as the passive attitudes of the Ministries of Education and of Health and Welfare.

2.2.3. Governmental Efforts of President Kim Dae Jung

The Reform Plan of Early Childhood Education System proposed in 1997 was included in the election pledges of President Kim Dae Jung. As a result, the National Assembly and the government consistently showed concern for the Reform Plan.

1. President D. J. Kim's election pledges and the concerns of the governmental party

President D.J. Kim's election pledges relating to early childhood education included the establishment of the preschool system and introducing early childhood education into the public school system by legislating the *Early Childhood Education Act;* the provision of free education to five-year-old children, with a gradual extension to three- and four-year-old children; and the provision of free childcare to infants from zero to two. After the election, the new government included reform of the early childhood system and free education for five-year-old children among its "100 Tasks".

In June 1998, the governmental party established the 17-member "Policy Planning Team for the Establishment of *Early Childhood Education Act*" consisting of renowned scholars in the fields of early childhood education and of childcare, and representatives of related organisations and of parents' groups. After five meetings, the Policy Planning Team remained divided: nine members were in favour of the legislation, five objected and three deferred their decision. (Kindergartens, early childhood education academics and parents' organisations agreed while national/public childcare facilities, childcare scholars and women's organisations were opposed. Private childcare facilities agreed at first and later deferred their decision.)

The National Assembly concluded that reforming the ECEC system and legislating the *Early Childhood Education Act* would not be easy. Even though a majority of the Policy Planning Team members agreed to the system reform and the legislation of the Act, the National Assembly turned their back on it.

2. Concerns of the National Assembly

The Assembly Forum on Education Policy, bringing together 26 members of the governmental and opposition parties, met four times to discuss early childhood education between 1998 and 2000, focusing on policy reform and legislating the *Early Childhood Education Act*.

Draft legislation for the *Early Childhood Education Act* was submitted to the Assembly plenary session three times from 1997 to 2001. Kim Won Gil and 78 Assembly members proposed the Act for the first time in November 1997. Next Chung Hee Kyung and 104 Assembly members proposed it again in September 1999. Both proposals were discarded automatically due to the shutdown of the 15th regular session of the Assembly in May 2000. Assemblyman Lee Jae Jeong, proposed the Act again in 2001, and the Act has remained under consideration since then. However, the current

draft was modified to accommodate the objections of childcare-related organisations and Hakwons, so that the law, if enacted, would require only kindergartens to be transformed into Preschools.

In summary, at first (from 1998 to 1999), both the government and opposition parties advocated the reform of the early childhood education system. Later, they became passive toward the reform due to strong resistance from the Ministry of Health and Welfare, national/public childcare facilities and the Hakwon associations.

3. Advocacy of early childhood education organisations

Kindergartens and early childhood education organisations advocated the establishment of the Preschool System and legislation of the *Early Childhood Education Act* for the following reasons:

First, the necessary foundation of Korea's human resources management system must be built from the early years. This cannot be achieved through the current inefficient and redundant use of human and material resources under different administrative auspices, or under the current laws of "education" and "care".

Second, ECEC must become part of the public school system in order to lessen reliance on private funds and the financial burden on parents. An additional benefit is that publicly funded education and care services can facilitate the balanced and harmonious development of children at the same time as they support the social and economic activities of parents.

Efforts by kindergartens and early childhood education organizations to reform the system are summarised as follows:

Table 15. Early Childhood Education Organisations and their Activities in the Support of the Reform Plan

Organisations/ Time period	Activities
1) "Pan-national Association for Actualisation of Public Early Childhood Education System" (1997) was set up by 31 organisations including private kindergarten associations, the National Trade Union of Kindergarten Teachers, Associations of Professors of Departments of Early Childhood Education, parental associations, and so on	- Interviews with representatives of the three political parties & members of the Committee of Legislative Prerogatives of the National Assembly to explain the position of the Pan-national Association - Constant demonstrations and meetings as well as seminars and forums of participating associations - Submitting the *Early Childhood Education Act* to a regular session of the Assembly three times (1997-present) - Initiating parents' signature campaigns
2) "Early Childhood Education Task Force" (1997) set up by the Ministry of Education	- Planning specific processes for the Reform Plan reported in June 1997 - Preparing the Promotion Plan of Early Childhood Education by the Office of the Prime Minister as the Bill. No. 18 of the National Assembly
3) "Policy Planning Team and the Committee of Promotion of Early Childhood Education Development" (2000) set up by the Ministry of Education	- Meeting childcare and Hakwon associations regularly - Reporting the outcome to the Minister of Education in "The Comprehensive Plan of Early Childhood Education Development" (November 2000)

4. Resistance of the Ministry of Health and Welfare and Childcare Associations

The Ministry of Health and Welfare played a key role in maintaining the current system by insisting on two main justifications:

First, it argued that establishing the Preschool system would have a detrimental impact on the ongoing development of childcare. The ministry has supported and overseen a dramatic expansion of childcare since the promulgation of the 1991 *Child Care Act*, and opposes whimsical changes to government polices while calling for more time to pursue its own efforts.

Second, it said the current dual system of ECEC should be continued because children from 0 to 5 are more in need of "homely care" than "schooling education".

Apart from these reasons, governmental authorities and organisations concerned with childcare also had some practical worries. For example, many childcare services are provided in rented facilities with inferior conditions and cannot be converted into Preschools. Besides, the new facilities are supposed to be only for children under three.

The specific steps taken by the Ministry of Health and Welfare and childcare associations against the Preschool system are summarised as follows:

Table 16. Childcare Organisations and their Activities Against the Reform Plan

Organisations / Time period	Activities
1) Pan-national Association for Anti-Early Childhood Education Act (1998) was set up by 48 organisations including childcare associations, the Association of Childcare Teachers, women's organisations, etc.	- Meeting representatives of the three political parties & members of the Committee of Legislative Prerogatives at the National Assembly to explain the position of the Pan-national Association of Anti-Early Childhood Education Act - Constant demonstrations and meetings as well as seminars and forums on the issue - Organising the Emergency Committee on Anti-Early Childhood Education Act (1999) - Submitting the amended Child Care Act to the Assembly Committee of Health and Welfare
2) Committee of Childcare Development (2000) under the Ministry of Health and Welfare	- Acting as the counterpart of the Committee on Promotion of Early Childhood Education Development - Holding several public hearings - Proposing the Plan of Childcare Development Policy in 2001 - Addressing the Ministry of Gender Equality's concerns on Childcare

5. The Compromise between the Ministries of Education and of Health and Welfare

As kindergartens and childcare facilities stuck to their positions, dialogue between the two ceased, leading the Ministries of Education and of Health and Welfare to initiate discussions with each other. In their first meeting, held in December 2000, the two Ministries decided that the current dual system would be kept for the short term to achieve the integration of kindergartens and childcare facilities. They also decided to draft plans for linking kindergartens and childcare facilities. The plans were to be carried out by the Office of Government Policy Coordination under the Prime Minister. The second meeting achieved agreement on the need to legislate the *Early Childhood Education Act*, while disagreement persisted over renaming kindergartens as Preschools, as well as on running full-day programmes all year round in kindergartens.

At additional meetings, the two Ministries discussed converting Children's Houses into preschools, coordinating supervision of kindergartens and Children's Houses, setting criteria for five-year-olds' eligibility for free education and childcare, and so on. In November 2002, an inter-ministerial steering committee on ECEC reform

was set up and was to report results of discussions to the new government by January 2003.

III. Evaluation

Reform of the Korean ECEC system has not been successful in the five years since its inception in 1997. At present, the Ministry of Education remains in charge of kindergartens for children from age three to five while the Ministry of Health and Welfare is responsible for childcare facilities for children from age zero to five. Nonetheless, the attempted reform has had an impact on ECEC-related organisations and associations, government authorities and agencies, and kindergarten and childcare services. This section reviews and discusses the outcomes, impacts and lessons of ECEC system reform in Korea.

3.1. Outcomes

3.1.1. Increased government concern for early childhood education and care

The most remarkable achievement of the reform has been increased interest in ECEC on the part of government authorities such as the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and the National Budget and Planning Committee. The Ministries of Education and of Health and Welfare showed unprecedented concern by organizing, respectively, the ECE Development Committee and the Child Care Development Committee. In addition, the Ministry of Education founded an independent Early Childhood Education Division, which used to part of the Special Education Division. The Ministry of Health and Welfare also founded an independent Child Care and Education Division separate from the Department of Child Development and Child Care. The establishment of the two ECEC government divisions was a noteworthy decision at a time when the Korean government was taking streamlining measures.

The National Budget and Planning Committee and the Prime Minister also paid keen attention to ECEC experts in the field, and approved budgetary increases even in an economic crisis. Notably, budgets for private kindergartens (e.g., equipment and teaching materials) and for free education of five-year-olds in childcare facilities have been supported since 2002. Before then, only childcare facilities received such aid, and only kindergarten children attended for free. In addition, larger budgets have been allocated to infant care facilities and parental leave in 2003.

3.1.2. Increased concern in the National Assembly for early childhood education and care

ECEC has never been a major issue for the National Assembly before now. Most Assembly members could not state the difference between kindergartens, childcare facilities and Hakwons, and wondered why people in the field had such different opinions and positions. Only gradually did they come to realise that kindergartens supervised by the Ministry of Education advocated system reform while childcare facilities managed by the Ministry of Health and Welfare were opposed to it. They also realised that both parents and those involved in kindergartens and childcare facilities are voters. Taking the political stakes into consideration, the Assembly members did not take sides, but instead developed increased concern for ECEC.

3.1.3. Increased concern among parent groups and women's organisations for early childhood education and care

As Korean society became more democratic, various groups were became increasingly interested in the reform of the ECEC system. Parent groups and associations of

kindergarten teachers agreed to the reform, while childcare teachers and women's organizations wanted to expand childcare. They all became interested in ECEC, even while having different positions towards the reforms.

3.1.4. The increased interest in early childhood education and care reflected in the media

Perhaps for the first time in Korean history, the print and broadcast media paid close attention to the ECEC reforms, widely publicising forums, panel discussions and public hearings on the subject. In particular, the media scrutinised ECEC in Korea against that in other OECD countries in terms of access to services, administrative systems, funding and other criteria.

3.2. Impacts

3.2.1. Increasingly integrated kindergarten and childcare services

As ECEC reforms were proposed and discussed, kindergartens began providing more extended-day and full-day programmes. The "educational" functions of childcare facilities were emphasised, as Hakwons provided education in the morning and care and special talent education in the afternoon. On the surface, ECEC institutions became more similar in function, and the concept of "service" appealed more strongly than ever before. As integrated ECEC services came to be provided to children within a single institution (either kindergarten or childcare facilities), the rationale for a unified ECEC administrative system has become evident.

3.2.2. ECEC associations' strengthened cooperation and greater influence

Kindergartens and childcare facilities have greatly gained in influence with the government and the National Assembly. Political figures now commonly attend annual events of national kindergarten and childcare associations. In addition, Ministries routinely confer with teachers' and directors' associations in setting ECEC policies. In short, associations of kindergartens and childcare facilities have become significant policy-making partners that the government cannot afford to ignore.

3.2.3. Increased parental participation and concern

The reforms have had a great impact on parental thinking and involvement in ECEC, with parents taking part in signature campaigns for free education for five-year-old children as well as for the reforms. The mass media have helped parents develop their interest in and their own perspectives on ECEC.

3.2.4. Increased research on the early childhood education and care system

Korean scholars in the field have concentrated on developing ECEC "software" (e.g., programmes). The system reform proposed in 1997 particularly spurred research comparing ECEC systems and policies in Korea with those of other OECD countries (e.g., Na, 1997; Na, Kim, Park, Jang & Chung, 1997; Na, Jang & Moon, 2000; Na, Yoo & Moon, 2000; Lee et al., 2001; Lee, 2000; Yang et al., 2000). Many conferences and seminars were also held concerning ECEC "hardware", such as the establishment of ECEC as part of the public school system, public childcare, ECEC administration and finance, teacher training systems, laws and regulations, and so on.

3.3. Lessons

A considerable political process is typically necessary to realise new ideas within governmental policies and systems. The most important first step toward achieving this is to reach a consensus among individual communities with pan-national support. The reform of the ECEC system is no exception.

Perhaps the main reason ECEC system reform has failed lies in the inability to reach consensus among scholars, people involved in kindergarten and childcare facilities, and public organisations. Opponents of reform insisted on maintaining the current dual administrative system by highlighting their conception of education and care. Lacking political strategies and qualities, the initiators of the reform plan were unable to overcome misunderstandings surrounding the ECEC concept and systems. The following approaches may be useful to address these issues.

First, the conception of education and care needs modification.

The biggest obstacle to the reform of the ECEC system in Korea is the tendency to divide government officials, scholars and practitioners between those in the field of education and those in childcare, possibly as a result of the heavy influence of the Japanese system in Korea.

The rise in women's social participation has been accompanied by a greater need for childcare. In addition, as the family's educational function has decreased, the demand has grown for education outside the home. It is in this context that parents demand institutions that provide both education and care for their children.

In particular, the early years are not an appropriate time to provide education and care separately to children. Thus there is an urgent need to conceptualise the integration of small children's education and care.

Second, government officials need to discard their obsession with authority.

Another serious obstacle to system reform is the authority-centered attitude of government officials. From the outset of the reform plan, Ministry of Health and Welfare officials were strongly opposed, pointing to a decade of work they had carried out for the expansion of childcare. They prepared and distributed documents to validate their insistence on maintaining the current system and held forums to warn of the adverse effects they predicted for childcare.

On the other hand, high-ranking Ministry of Education officials expressed unease with frequent debates on ECEC system reform. Mindful of funding issues and existing relationships with the Ministry of Health and Welfare, they did not want to discuss the reforms in public. They felt the Ministry of Education could not lead the reforms without a go-ahead from the President. They also insisted that the government could not allocate more of the budget to ECEC than before. Their logic was that budget funds would simply be shifted from other levels of education, which would suffer as a result.

Such attitudes among government officials undermine attempts at reform. The officials should place the needs of children and parents first, place a high value on education and care in the early years, and help to build a foundation for women's social participation through providing quality education and care services.

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